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SUBJECT: CAMEROON: JULY ELECTIONS APPROACH, UNCERTAINLY

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[1B](#). 06 YAOUNDE 1422
[1C](#). 06 YAOUNDE 1142

YAOUNDE 00000418 001.2 OF 002

[11](#). (U) Legislative and municipal elections in Cameroon most likely will be held July 22. Under that scenario, voter registration, in accordance with the law, would end on April 23, when President Biya would call the elections. Some here hope to register some 8 million voters, a feat that would require adding close to a million voters a week to the registers before they close. Significant voter apathy stands in the way of what is already a formidable logistical challenge. This message describes the latest administrative and political developments related to the upcoming elections.

[12](#). (U) VOTER MOBILIZATION. As part of our cooperative effort to urge Cameroonians to register to vote, Ambassador Marquardt -- along with his Dutch counterpart and the acting UN Resident Representative -- distributed checks March 30 to nine local NGOs that will direct voter registration activities in Cameroon's ten provinces. The groups were supplied with UNDP-produced pamphlets and posters explaining the registration and voting procedures. Providing NGOs with printed material not only saved money (many groups wanted to produce their own handouts) but also helps ensure a consistent message on voting and registration procedures. Canada handed out checks the previous week, for much the same purpose.

[13](#). (SBU) VOTER APATHY STILL FAR REACHING. In addition to the many ordinary Cameroonians who never bothered to register to vote (or who gave up in frustration after trying), many others who "ought" to, have not either. Western embassies (including our own), international NGOs and UN bodies, and even the National Election Observatory count low numbers of registered voters among their Cameroonian employees. Prominent Cameroonians are equally apathetic. Akere Muna, well known attorney and Transparency International Vice President, brother of both a political party leader and a member of government, not to mention the son of a former Vice President and Prime Minister of Cameroon, told us March 31 that he is not registered to vote. Many see it as simply too time-consuming and not likely to make any difference.

[14](#). (U) IF YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH TO REACH THE LEVER: Cameroon's Interior Ministry, charged with running the legislative and

municipal elections slated for July 2007, has made available on the internet a province-by-province list of registered voters; these are previous voters who have been put onto computerized list. The effort, with technical support from UNDP, has already succeeded in bringing unprecedented transparency to the deficiencies in Cameroon's electoral rolls. An embassy search of the Central Province, for example, found 22 voters with dates of birth in 1992, far too young to vote in Cameroon. (The minimum age is 20 but the youngest registered voter has a date of birth of 2005.) On the flipside, the Central Province also boasts 34 registered voters born in 1900 and 115 in 1901! In terms of voter registration, the Government faces a double challenge with less than four months until the elections: how to convince the jaded Cameroonian population that it is worth the time and trouble to register, and that the new computerized system will prevent people from exploiting these problematic entries.

15. (SBU) SDF MUNA FACTION -- OUT WITH A WHIMPER. After nearly a year of Social Democratic Front (SDF) in-fighting, the so-called Muna faction (led by prominent attorney Bernard "Ben" Muna, another of Akere Muna's brothers, Ref C) has broken from the party to join others in an opposition alliance. Muna dissolved his faction of the SDF, Cameroon's leading opposition party, to form the Alliance of Progressive Forces (French acronym: AFP), a group of small opposition parties. (Reftels provided details on the SDF rift.) While the ADF is unlikely to be much of a force in the upcoming elections, the willingness of opposition parties to unite is promising, insofar as the opposition's goal of challenging the ruling party is concerned. As we have reported for some time, disarray among the opposition makes it unnecessary for the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) to steal the election -- the splintered opposition is more likely to hand it victory.

16. (SBU) MINISTER MARAFA HIMSELF UNEASY. Ambassador called on April 2 on Interior Minister Marafa, whose Ministry

YAOUNDE 00000418 002.2 OF 002

(MINADT) is charged with organizing the elections. The Ambassador briefed him on embassy support for registration and cast his own recent public diplomacy efforts -- some of which have been very critical of administration bungling and delay -- in the light of trying to overcome voter apathy by raising interest and awareness before registration closes. Marafa said he appreciated the support and agreed that credibility and success in 2007 is critical to successful presidential elections slated for 2011. He also expressed some new frustrations. He said that the Presidency needs to issue a decree spelling out the circumscriptions and other parameters for the new municipal councils, following legal changes in 2004 that, among other things, will abolish the urban councils in major cities like Garoua and Bamenda. That needs to happen as soon as possible, so candidates will know what they can run for, and not on the very eve of the calling of the elections; otherwise, he would expect a public outcry.

The Presidency has had this under review since February, he said. Marafa said he expects elections to be called for July 22, though under the law they could take place one week later; that, however, would leave no margin for error and should be avoided, he said. He also mentioned the possibility of a one-month postponement to allow for better preparations, then quickly discounted it. Marafa said he hopes to register one million more voters than the 4.6 million already on the register from 2004 -- a modest ambition that falls far short of what many are describing as a prerequisite to success on election day. Marafa lamented that Cameroonians are more interested in the upcoming French elections than in their own, and suggested that the Nigerian elections are what should really matter in Cameroon.

MARQUARDT